



## **New Jersey Department of Children and Families Policy Manual**

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### **Appendices - Family Unification Program 6-25-2012**

The Family Unification Program is a cooperative program between the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) or the local Housing Authorities in Newark, Lakewood, Jersey City, and East Orange and CP&P to provide Section 8 Housing Certificates to eligible families. The program is limited to, and available in, these jurisdictions only.

The Area Office and the CP&P Family Unification Liaison will be notified of the available Housing Certificates for the County and the amount of certificates distributed to each Local Office.

### **Eligibility Criteria 6-25-2012**

Eligibility for the Family Unification Program is based on the following criteria:

- 1) A family must lack adequate housing, which is the primary factor for the imminent placement of a child in out of home placement, or reunification is delayed for the child due to the family's inability to secure affordable housing; and
- 2) The family must meet Section 8 eligibility criteria as determined by the local Housing Authority or DCA.

### **Guidelines for Identifying Potential Candidate Families 6-25-2012**

Use the following guidelines to identify families who may be eligible for the Family Unification Program:

**Homelessness:** Homeless families include families that lack adequate permanent housing for which they are the lease holder or pay rent on a monthly basis. Such families currently:

- Reside in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living conditions including welfare motels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill;

- Reside in an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals to be institutionalized;
- Occupy a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; and/or
- Reside with relatives or friends temporarily, and are being displaced because they jeopardize the housing stability of their host.

**Involuntarily Displaced as a Result of Violence:** If the family will be or has been involuntarily displaced as a result of domestic violence, after reviewing any existing court orders, look at the following issues:

- There must be actual or threatened violence directed against the applicant or one or more members of the applicant's family by a spouse/civil union or domestic partner or other member of the applicant's family or household;
- The actual or threatened violence must be determined to have occurred recently or be of a continuous nature; and
- The family must have a referral by the Local Office Domestic Violence Liaison recommending housing.

**Additional Criteria:** The Section 8 housing certificates are limited in this program, and once assigned to a family, are extremely difficult to take away and reassign to another family. Families hold these certificates for at least 5 years.

Since the purpose of this program is the reunification of children and families, or the prevention of family break-up, priority is given to families where preservation is a long term realistic goal. For this reason, referrals are made for those families that would most benefit from this program. This includes:

- Families with younger children;
- Families that have a good history of paying their rent; and
- Families that do not have other contributing factors which would prevent family reunification or family preservation.

## **Referral Procedures**

**8-20-96**

- 1) Based on the above criteria, the Worker:

- Identifies a family for possible referral to the Family Unification Program, and
  - Discusses the family's situation with his/her Supervisor.
- 2) If the Worker and Supervisor agree that the family appears to meet the criteria for the Family Unification Program, the Worker completes a referral using CP&P Form [10-98](#), Referral to Family Unification Program.
  - 3) The Supervisor indicates agreement with the referral by signing the form.
  - 4) The Worker gives the referral form to the CP&P Family Unification Liaison.
  - 5) The CP&P Family Unification Liaison reviews all of the referrals and sends the highest priority referrals, those needing the service most urgently, to the local Housing Authority/DCA.
  - 6) The local Housing Authority/DCA makes the final determination whether the family is eligible for the program based on the Section 8 eligibility guidelines, and advises the Family Unification Liaison about each case within 14 days.
  - 7) The Worker and client may attend briefings.
  - 8) The CP&P Family Unification Liaison advises the Worker and/or Supervisor regarding the family's eligibility.
  - 9) When a family has been found eligible, the Worker shares the information in the Case Plan with the local Housing Authority/DCA representative that he or she will need in order to provide services to the family. Staff from these agencies are very knowledgeable about housing issues, and can provide expertise in these areas.
  - 10) In counties that have the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, staff help obtain these additional services for families. The Self-Sufficiency Program provides basic living skills such as housekeeping, goal-setting, and budgeting. (Ask the Resource Development Specialist if your county offers this program.)
  - 11) CP&P continues to be responsible for providing or arranging other services that the family may need.
  - 12) The Worker keeps the case open a minimum of three months after the family enters the Family Unification Program, unless it can be documented that family problems which could indicate immediate risk of abuse and neglect or family disruption have been addressed and there is no reason for CP&P involvement.

- 13) The Worker, with the Supervisor's approval, notifies the CP&P Family Unification Liaison at least 7 days before closing a case.
- 14) The CP&P Family Unification Liaison notifies the local Housing Authority/ DCA that CP&P plans to close the case and the date of the closing.
- 15) If there is a need for conflict resolution:
  - The CP&P Family Unification Liaison and Section 8 Supervisor meet and attempt to resolve the situation.
  - If there is no agreement, the Local Office Manager and Section 8 Supervisor meet to resolve the conflict.
  - If there is no resolution, the case is presented to the Area/Regional staff from both Divisions who meet to resolve the problem.
  - If there is still no resolution, the case is presented to the CP&P and DCA Statewide Liaisons for a final decision.

#### **CP&P Family Unification Liaison      8-20-96**

In each county in which the Family Unification Program is operating, each Local Office Manager within the county is responsible for identifying a staff member to serve as the CP&P Family Unification Liaison.

The responsibilities of the CP&P Family Unification Liaison include:

- Attending state, regional and county program meetings;
- Being familiar with the program, eligibility criteria, and leasing process;
- Establishing and maintaining contact with the DCA/local Housing Authority representative;
- Facilitating referrals from the Local Office to the DCA/local Housing Authority;
- Helping to resolve issues between the Division and the DCA/local Housing Authority;
- Informing Local Office staff regarding the program;
- Attending Section 8 briefings with the client family with the Worker, as needed; and

- Working with the Worker and DCA staff to help families deal with paperwork and housing search issues.